

MINUTES

MONTANA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES 57th LEGISLATURE - REGULAR SESSION COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

Call to Order: By **CHAIRMAN CINDY YOUNKIN**, on April 9, 2001 at 1:25 P.M., in Room 152 Capitol.

ROLL CALL

Members Present:

Rep. Cindy Younkin, Chairman (R)
Rep. Rick Dale, Vice Chairman (R)
Rep. Gail Gutsche, Vice Chairman (D)
Rep. Dee Brown (R)
Rep. Gilda Clancy (R)
Rep. Aubyn A. Curtiss (R)
Rep. Larry Cyr (D)
Rep. Bill Eggers (D)
Rep. Ron Erickson (D)
Rep. Christopher Harris (D)
Rep. Linda Holden (R)
Rep. Joan Hurdle (D)
Rep. Rick Laible (R)
Rep. Jeff Laszloffy (R)
Rep. Bob Story (R)

Members Excused: Rep. Keith Bales (R)
Rep. Rod Bitney (R)
Rep. Douglas Mood (R)
Rep. Brett Tramelli (D)
Rep. David Wanzienried (D)

Members Absent: None.

Staff Present: Holly Jordan, Committee Secretary
Krista Lee Evans, Legislative Branch

Please Note: These are summary minutes. Testimony and discussion are paraphrased and condensed.

Committee Business Summary:

Hearing(s) & Date(s) Posted: HJ 42, 4/6/2001
Executive Action: HJ 42

HEARING ON HJ 42

Sponsor: REP. CHRISTINE KAUFMANN, HD 53, Helena

Proponents: Pat Clinch, MJSCPFF

Opponents: None.

Opening Statement by Sponsor:

{Tape : 1; Side : A; Approx. Time Counter : 0.1}

REP. CHRISTINE KAUFMANN, HD 53, Helena, stated that she was shocked to find out how the fires of 2000 were funded. It is odd that there is no money set aside to fund these fires. She talked about the bill she sponsored which was killed in House Taxation. It is a good idea to have a study to look at ways to fund fires. When firefighters have to be concerned about protecting structures, rather than fighting a wildfire, the costs go up astronomically. There are many questions that need to be addressed in this study. She asked for a do pass.

Proponents' Testimony:

{Tape : 1; Side : A; Approx. Time Counter : 4.2}

Pat Clinch, MJSCPFF, stated this bill is a good idea as it will help all firefighters in the state of Montana.

Opponents' Testimony: None.

Informational Testimony:

{Tape : 1; Side : A; Approx. Time Counter : 5.7}

Ann Bauchman, DNRC, stated, there are problems that have surfaced over the past several years. There are no funds appropriated for fires so fire prevention has become more and more interesting. She spoke of the fires of 2000 and where the money came from. The dynamics of fighting fires have changed and therefore the costs have escalated. There is an equity in the citizens who live in the highly forested areas and the department is looking at a way to resolve that.

Questions from Committee Members and Responses:

{Tape : 1; Side : A; Approx. Time Counter : 9}

REP. HARRIS asked **Ms. Bauchman** for a estimate of what it costs to fight a fire on land with structures vs. a fire with no structures involved, per acre. **Ms. Bauchman** stated, if you can keep a fire within ten acres the costs are minimal. She did not have an exact amount. **REP. HARRIS** asked, is it vastly more expensive to fight a fire with structures involved? **Ms. Bauchman** stated, it can be from four to ten times more costly and also more dangerous for firefighters. **REP. HARRIS** stated, the beneficiaries in fire suppression are insurance companies. Is there any thought to any kind of fee on fire insurance policies that would help compensate DNRC? **Ms. Bauchman** stated, the insurance companies did pay some during the fires of 2000. The counties bill them for some costs.

REP. CLANCY asked **Ms. Bauchman** what the fires of 2000 cost the state. **Ms. Bauchman** stated, it was close to \$60,000,000. **REP. CLANCY** asked, how much of that cost did FEMA cover? **Ms. Bauchman** stated, about \$37,000,000 is being reimbursed by FEMA.

REP. CLANCY asked **REP. KAUFMANN** if any bills were passed this session that deal with firefighting or the costs thereof. **REP. KAUFMANN** stated yes, there were two supplemental appropriation bills passed. **REP. CLANCY** asked, how much has been appropriated for possible future firefighting costs. **REP. KAUFMANN** stated, the funds have not been appropriated for the future. The cost to suppress a fire has not been appropriated.

REP. YOUNKIN asked **REP. KAUFMANN**, regarding line 10, we have had periodic drought conditions not constant drought conditions. Whether you have drought conditions or not there is always the threat of fire. Would you object to an amendment to address that? **REP. KAUFMANN** stated she did not have a problem with amending that line or deleting it.

Closing by Sponsor:

{Tape : 1; Side : A; Approx. Time Counter : 13.7}

REP. KAUFMANN, stated we may be heading into another severe fire season. The time is right to be looking at these issues. She urged a do pass.

EXECUTIVE ACTION ON HJ 42

{Tape : 1; Side : A; Approx. Time Counter : 14.5}

Motion: **REP. GUTSCHE** moved that **HJ 42 DO PASS.**

Discussion: REP. HARRIS stated, it is important for this study to look at the benefits that the insurance company will get as a result of this multi-million dollar firefighting effort that Montana will launch. He suggested a surcharge on the price of fire insurance policies.

REP. KAUFMANN stated, the LFD raised a major issue on the fire suppression cost in their budget review. This insurance issue was an issue raised in that report.

Motion/Vote: REP. YOUNKIN moved AN AMENDMENT TO DELETE LINE 10 OF HJ 42 BE ADOPTED. Motion carried 19-1 with Hurdle voting no.

Motion/Vote: REP. GUTSCHE moved that HJ 42 DO PASS AS AMENDED. Motion carried unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 1:45 P.M.

REP. CINDY YOUNKIN, Chairman

HOLLY JORDAN, Secretary

CY/HJ

EXHIBIT (nah80aad)